## ABSTRACT

Apparatus and methods are provided for interacting light with particles, including but not limited to biological matter such as cells, in unique and highly useful ways. Optophoresis consists of subjecting particles to various optical forces, especially optical gradient forces, and more particularly moving optical gradient forces, so as to obtain useful results. In biology, this technology represents a practical approach to probing the inner workings of a living cell, preferably without any dyes, labels or other markers. In one aspect, a particle may be characterized by determining its optophoretic constant or signature. For example, a diseased cell has a different optophoretic constant from a healthy cell, thereby providing information, or the basis for sorting. In the event of physical sorting, various forces may be used for separation, including fluidic forces, such as through the use of laminar flow, or optical forces, or mechanical forces, such as through adhesion. Various techniques for measuring the dielectric constant of particles are provided.